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SIPDIS

FOR R, P AND AF/W

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TAGS: [FAIR](#) [GH](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM IN GHANA

REF: A. STATE 159129

[B](#). ACCRA 661

Classified By: PolChief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: There is little political or religious extremism in Ghana. The Mission has an active Muslim outreach program and the USG spends about \$12 million in programs annually directed largely at Ghana's 20 percent Muslim population. Other Mission activities help promote tolerance, including a large Peace Corps program. Government of Ghana officials speak publicly about the need for tolerance. Ghanaian NGOs, including many faith-based organizations, actively promote tolerance and condemn violence. We get excellent GOG cooperation on counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing. We plan to expand our Muslim outreach and to continue emphasizing moderation and tolerance in our public comments and programs. The threat of large extremist movements is low but Ghana remains vulnerable to terrorist violence from small groups taking advantage of Ghana's openness and porous borders. End summary.

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Extremism Not a Problem in Ghana  
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[1](#)2. (C) Some 100 linguistic and ethnic groups live peacefully in Ghana and relations between Christians and the 20 percent Muslim population are generally good. The government and most individual Ghanaians welcome refugees (there are around 60,000 in Ghana today). A July 6, 2005 public opinion survey by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) found that, while ethnic awareness remains high, a plurality of Ghanaians (42%) feel equal loyalty to their Ghanaian and ethnic identities. Civil society groups, including churches, actively promote social tolerance and conflict resolution. The social tensions that do exist often revolve around traditional chieftancy disputes (mostly related to land, status and inheritance), inter- and intra-party political rivalry, and friction within the Muslim community (between moderate Tijanias and more extreme Alhasunas and between Andani and Abudu "gates" in the Northern Region). There are traditional ethnic feuds, especially in northern Ghana, which in the past have occasionally led to violence. Nationally, there is some degree of resentment by others against the dominant Akan ethnic/linguistic group, as well as by northerners against the politically dominant southerners. Conflicts tend to be localized, and not ideological or religious.

[1](#)3. (C) In recent years we have encountered some criticism of U.S. global policy, specifically our policy in the Middle East. However, the vast majority of Ghanaian Muslims are moderate and their leaders welcomed our efforts through our Muslim Outreach Program. Former Ambassador Yates was warmly received in farewell calls on major Muslim leaders, including the National Chief Imam. At one late night Islamic event last month attended by the National Chief Imam, the organizing Imam began by announcing his group's love for America, their love for the U.S. Embassy in Ghana, and their love for the charge d'affaires, who was attending. The more radical Alhasuna leadership has gradually become comfortable in meeting with us and participating in our programs. According to a February, 2005 Public Affairs Office of Research poll, the percentage of Ghanaian Muslims with a very favorable view of the United States increased from 38% in 2003 to 42% in 2004.

[1](#)4. (S) There is a small extreme element in the Muslim community, reflecting at least in part an aggressive Iranian and Saudi influence in northern regions. As reported ref B, Emboffs encountered this element in a March, 2005 trip to the northern city of Tamale, when Muslim students at the Tamale Polytechnic boycotted our scheduled meeting. We have also encountered extremist Muslims in Kumasi. As reported ref C, Ghana is not a major focus of terrorist organizations but has clear and significant vulnerabilities, including a porous border, corrupt border/customs officials and growing narcotics trafficking.

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Muslim Outreach Program  
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15. (U) The Mission counteracts extremism primarily through our inter-agency Muslim outreach program, which includes \$12 million in USG assistance to Ghana's Muslim community annually and benefits an estimated 210,000 people. Many offices in the Mission participate in this coordinated campaign.

16. (U) Overall Diplomacy and Dialogue:

-- The Embassy observes a number of events for Ramadan as part of our regular programming. Every year the Ambassador hosts an Iftaar dinner for the Muslim leadership; we make a presentation of a sheep to the National Chief Imam; and we donate food to needy Muslims through mosques in poor communities. Recently, we have also sponsored soccer tournaments and Koranic quizzes for Muslim youth.

-- In 2004, the Embassy held a conference to explain scholarship and educational assistance programs to Muslim educators and student leaders.

-- Throughout 2003 and 2004 we held dialogues with Muslim students and community leaders in Accra, Tamale, Kumasi and other parts of the country.

17. (U) Public Affairs Programs (All long-term)

- Muslim mid-career professionals and opinion leaders, have participated in various exchange programs to expose them to US society and culture, and the principles of religious tolerance. In October 2004, Muslim youth leaders from both the ruling and the main opposition parties participated in a three-week International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) under the theme "Youth Leadership in the US". One has since become a member of Ghana's Parliament.

- A teacher at an Islamic high school, who participated in an IVLP under the theme "US Society and the Political Process", is host of a religious program on two nationwide TV stations. He is one of post,s main liaisons with different segments of the Muslim community. For example, he mobilized Muslim students for a speaker program with US speaker, Imam Yahya Hendi, who spoke about "Islam in the U.S." He also helped prepare the guest list of Muslims for post,s annual hosting of the Iftaar dinner during Ramadan.

- Two Muslim women participated in different women,s leadership programs in 2003 and 2004. Both have since spoken strongly about working in the predominantly-Muslim north to help young girls enroll and stay in school. One has resigned from her private legal practice in southern Ghana and returned north to begin her NGO work.

- One Muslim journalist IVLP beneficiary from northern Ghana works with a state-owned,nationwide radio broadcasting station and his programs are aired across the country. A Muslim police officer who participated in an IVLP on Combating International Crime and Terrorism returned with new ideas on how Ghana could better protect its borders.

- U.S. Imam Yahya Hendi was brought from Georgetown University to Ghana under the speaker program and told various Muslim leaders and youth audiences in Accra and Kumasi how Muslims, and others, practice their religion freely and observe their own religious holidays in the United States. Many listeners, especially youth, did not know that Muslims could freely practice their religion in the United States.

-A U.S. speaker on grassroots democracy held a three-day conference for NGO representatives, local and regional officials and journalists, including some Muslims, on how to make government officials more responsive to community needs. Many participants continue to network among themselves to seek greater accountability from their political leaders in northern Ghana. Our Public Affairs Section monitors the media for stories related to extremism, engaging the press on the need for responsible journalism, and discouraging stories which contribute to violence or extremism.

18. (U) Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) Programs (Long-term)

-- In Nima, Accra's largest Muslim community (and one of its poorest neighborhoods), with 2005 funding, ODC is:

-constructing an Islamic Community Center.  
-building and furnishing an addition to an existing medical clinic, which serves hundreds of thousands of people.  
-planning to build an office for the Islamic Education Unit of the Ministry of Education.

-- In Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, ODC is building a medical clinic for the Muslim community. We are waiting on the arrival of the property to furnish this clinic.

-- In Northern Ghana, ODC is:

- building and equipping a clinical lab at Navrongo Hospital.
- nearly finished with constructing and equipping \$200,000 worth of wells in disadvantaged, predominantly Muslim areas. (In 2005, we will contribute \$100,000 more to this construction).

ODC is also providing books and school furnishings to schools built with DOD funds in Nima and Apirede.

19. (U) USAID - All projects have 5-year timelines with, we hope, long-term impact.

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- USAID through Catholic Relief Services supports the Center for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies in the Northern Region, where there has been violence between ethnic groups (although not Muslims against Christians). The goals of the Center's activities are to:

- build capacity of chiefs and assembly members to resolve community conflicts
- facilitate radio and community peace programs
- set up Satellite Peace Centers with both Muslims and Christians working as mediators and trainers

This program benefits 8,000 Muslims directly (and about 20,000 people through radio programs). It is focused on communities with conflict and is funded with approximately \$216,500 from USAID and CRS over five years.

- USAID through Strengthening HIV/AIDS Partnerships in Education (SHAPE) promotes acceptance of people living with HIV/AIDS. As such, the SHAPE program not only de-stigmatizes AIDS victims contributes to the general level of tolerance in society. The SHAPE program start date was September 2, 2004.

- USAID supports Northern Ghana Peace-Building and Conflict Transformation (NGPBCCT). Also working through Catholic Relief Services, NGPBCCT works to reduce the frequency of violent conflicts and mitigate ongoing ones in Northern Ghana (where there is a large Muslim plurality) through building local conflict resolution capacity. The program will train 500 people.

- USAID through Food for Peace and in cooperation with TechnoServe/Ghana, runs programs that benefit 3000 Muslim households, providing technical assistance to farming groups to improve productivity and access bulk purchasers. The programs also train farmers in storage best practices and safe pesticide use, as well as in business management. They also provide assistance to shea and rice processing groups (especially female processors of shea butter and rice) and maize farmers, with funding of \$300,000 annually for five years.

USAID has numerous other programs in health, education, and governance, from which many Ghanaians (both Muslims and others) benefit, but those above are the ones most focused on the specific issues of tolerance and prevention/discouragement of extremism.

10. (U) Self Help Projects (Short-term)

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Muslim communities in the Upper West, Upper East and Northern regions benefit from the small projects of the Embassy's Self Help program. Over the past three years, the projects have totaled about \$30,000/year. In 2005, \$37,000 out of a budget of \$70,000 in Self Help Funds will be for Muslim communities. Over the years, these projects have included:

- Income generating projects - such as grinding and processing mills for rice, shea butter, groundnuts, and maize.
- Craft workshop centers for basket weavers, livestock rearing for women groups and cooperative groundnut farming.
- Health - by providing funds for a health center building
- Education - providing building materials for primary schools, feeding centers, vocational centers, libraries and day nurseries.
- Housing - for teachers
- Water - providing funds for laying of pvc pipes and provision of standing pipes.

These projects serve to demonstrate to Muslims that our economic assistance and concern is extended to them as much as to other Ghanaians. Muslims actually receive higher share proportionally than persons of other faiths in Ghana, based on their percentage of the population.

11. (U) Democracy and Human Rights Fund (Short-term)  
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- In 2004, the Embassy granted \$3,900 to the Islamic Foundation for Peace and Development for a series of workshops focused on child rights, including child protection, the right to education, forced marriage and child development. The workshops reached approximately 150 adults and 350 students in Muslim communities of Greater Accra. Community dramas and movies will also help educate the communities. We are expanding this program in 2005.

- In 2004, our DHRF program awarded grants to the Berekum Civic Union which reached 97,000 people with a message of political tolerance through a tolerance march and other events. Women in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding used DHRF funds for a series of workshops and radio programs to teach women mediation and conflict resolution skills.

12. (U) Other USG Programs Countering Extremism (Long Term)  
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In addition to our Muslim outreach program, other Mission programs promote tolerance and mitigate against extremism. The Peace Corps plays a particularly important role in Ghana. Both Ghanaians and Americans are justly proud that Ghana was first Peace Corps program to open, and has never had to close for any reason. Seven-thousand volunteers have served in Ghana since 1962. The constant presence of PCV's and their engagement with Ghanaians in all areas of the country have promoted peace, friendship, and a very favorable attitude towards the United States. For many Ghanaians, Peace Corps volunteers are the only Americans they meet. The Peace Corps has been, and remains, a constant and visible symbol of American friendship. Despite the vicissitudes of global relations and fluctuations in attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy over the years, the Peace Corps presence in Ghana has been key to stabilizing a positive view--and a sense that we are long-term friends who will not abandon Ghana.

13. (U) INL  
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Our International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) programs assist in professionalizing Ghana's security agencies and to build public confidence in them. The Department of Justice current provides 14 weeks of basic policing skills to 30 Ghana Police Service trainers, a program promoting respect for human rights, sensitivity to crime victims and community policing techniques. In 2004 the Embassy funded a new Internal Monitoring Unit to combat police corruption. In 2002, we introduced five bicycle patrol teams to Accra. In 2004, we donated 40 more bicycles to expand this community policing effort to Kumasi. These programs are aimed at increasing community interaction with police, breaking down mistrust and preventing the violence that can occur when communities grow frustrated by ineffective law enforcement. They undercut support for extremism by making the GOG more capable of providing protection for the people and more visibly active in promoting the public welfare.

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GOG and Local NGO Efforts  
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14. (S) GOG officials regularly emphasize peace and tolerance in their public statements. In his January 2004 State of the Nation address and his 2005 inaugural speech, President Kufuor emphasized the need for national unity and tolerance. The GOG is very supportive in the Global War On Terrorism and in sharing intelligence.

15. (SBU) In the education sector, the national curriculum pays particular attention to developing Ghanaian national identity. The government has also demonstrated a strong commitment to significantly increasing school attendance among poor and marginalized populations. Enrollment gains in the Muslim north have been particularly pronounced. Beginning five years ago, the government started providing support to Muslim schools. The Ministry of Education's Islamic Education Unit, established to help mainstream Islamic education in the national curriculum, has a moderating influence on Muslim schooling.

16. (SBU) The Ministry of Interior set up a committee of government officers and civil society elements, to mediate the Dagbon ethnic conflict. It has worked NGOs to develop an early warning system for violence and conflict in society. However, the initiative has not yet been implemented, and the GOG still works throughout traditional leaders (chiefs of varying levels) to counter extremism and promote tolerance.

17. (SBU) There are many Ghanaian NGOs and civil society groups which speak out and work against extremism. These include the Center for Democratic Development (CDD), the West

African Network for Peace (WANEP), the Christian Council, the Catholic Secretariat, the Ghanaian Conference of Religions for Peace, and inter-faith mediation teams in the northern regions. There are also several Muslim groups active in this area, such as the Friends Against Global Terrorism (FAGLAT) and the Muslim Dialogue and Humanitarian Organization. In addition, Ghana's free, lively media frequently carries commentary and reports related to promoting tolerance. An independent National Reconciliation Committee (NRC) completed its work in seeking truth behind Ghana's decades of human rights abuses before the current government. In some ways it has been the institutional embodiment of moderation in Ghanaian politics and society, intent on revealing the truth about years of autocratic rule and human rights violations. But it has rejected a policy of retribution that might engender a much more dangerous national extremism/polarization that could undermine present security and reinforce a cycle of revenge.

18. (SBU) We will reach out to the Tamale Polytechnic, which boycotted a previous visit by Embassy officers. We will seek opportunities to speak out publicly against extremism and in favor of tolerance. We plan to host a Daniel Pearl Music Day event in October which will give us an opportunity to reinforce this message. Ultimately, our work to promote economic and political development are key to promoting an atmosphere of tolerance. USAID's \$50-60 million program in Ghana, our election observing, our Peace Corps program and other efforts, help tackle the root of extremism and social conflict -- poverty and weak political institutions. We will continue this engagement and continue to publicly praise Ghana's tolerance and cooperation in counter-terrorism.

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Comment  
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19. (S) The level of extremism in Ghana is low and our outreach programs are extensive. We have made tremendous inroads with the Muslim community and have an ambitious program for Ramadan this year. USAID is doing an overall assessment of Muslim Education in Ghana in FY 2006. We have built new bridges with the Muslim Dialogue and Humanitarian Organization, a Muslim youth group which speaks out publicly against terrorism, and we are expanding cooperation with Friends Against Global Terrorism. Recently the Vice President of Ghana publicly acknowledged our work with the Muslim community. The Palestinian Dean of the Diplomatic Corps told assembled Ambassadors that he hears about our Outreach Program whenever he travels in Muslim areas.

20. (C) The Muslim communities we visit seem impressed and very grateful that we are paying attention to them. We believe this personal outreach part of the program is at least as important as the material and financial assistance we have provided. Our personal engagement with people and areas that might have previously been ignored is crucial. Instead of feeling snubbed, some of the dispossessed now feel more important, and more included in the national and international scene. In this regard, we also believe we could have an even greater impact if we had more means to focus on youth. The lack of educational and recreational opportunities for youth provide us with an opportunity to play a huge role if we commit the resources and people to do it. The Iranians and Saudis seem to have influence in Islamic schools and mosques with relatively less financial investment. The greater the engagement we can build and maintain with Muslims, especially youth, the greater the sense they have of connectedness to the West, and America in particular -- and the less threatening we both perceived each other to be.

21. (S) Ghana is not likely to experience a mass extremist political or anti-American movement, Muslim or otherwise. It is now democratic with a fairly moderate traditions of governance, and appreciation for the necessity of toleration. Ghana is also pro-American. However, the threat of terrorism remains clear and present, as the same live-and-let-live attitude that permeates Ghanaian culture also makes Ghana susceptible to ease of entry, to bribery of officials, and to security officers sometimes not noticing when real danger is present. A determined individual or foreigner (or small group of foreigners) would have little trouble perpetrating a deadly attack. In the contemporary social/political environment of West Africa, Ghana is an important, moderate friend and ally of the U.S., but its openness, its democratic government, and its friendship with the U.S. may make it a more likely target than its less friendly neighbors, and more vulnerable to a quick and violent terrorist attack by an individual or small non-indigenous group. Unlike some places, the moderate and long term trends in Ghana are quite positive. However, the physical vulnerability of U.S. personnel in the near term (until we move into the New Embassy Compound) remains serious, despite the relative paucity of extremist activity.

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